

Albert S. Scott.



A MAN.

A COMMEMORATIVE SERMON

PREACHED IN THE

UNITARIAN CHURCH, PETERBORO', N. H.,

ON THE SUNDAY MORNING, AUGUST 19, 1877,
FOLLOWING THE DEATH OF

HON. ALBERT S. SCOTT,

BY HIS PASTOR,

A. W. JACKSON.

PETERBORO':
PRESS OF FARNUM AND SCOTT.
1881.

"THERE WAS A MAN."

JOB, I: 1.

My discourse this morning is drawn from the contemplation of the life and character of our departed citizen and friend. Although the most appropriate word was spoken at his funeral last Thursday,* yet high the esteem in which he was held and his conspicuous worth make other services in the highest degree appropriate; and here in this church where his presence gave so much dignity, and in this society to the prosperity of which his counsels so largely contributed, some memorial seems not more a tribute due to him than a duty we owe ourselves. Besides, if these considerations did not hold, there is another which would move me to speak of him to-day. In all my moral instruction here I am guided by the conviction that men could hardly go astray would they follow what they honor. To hold this before them, therefore, and, if possible, lure them to it, is my steadfast aim and endeavor. The lessons of the pulpit, however, often fail in effectiveness by being presented in terms general and abstract. We were not wise, therefore, to forego the opportunity when it comes to contemplate them in a real human life.

You honored him. Men, I know, receive the honor of their fellows who are unworthy of it. They win it by the brilliancy of some special achievement. In this case, however, it is not thus. The honor and esteem in which you held him were the results of an open, transparent life-walk and conversation in your midst. You honored him for that which you would honor in yourselves: for that which is intrinsically honorable. You honored *him*; and his acknowledged pre-eminence here, the wide reach of his influence, the general confidence reposed in him, these are the meas-

*By Rev. John H. Morison, D. D.

ure of that honor. What a place he filled in our midst? How large a gap is made by his departure! In this community, where party spirit is exceptionally intense, and sectarian feeling exceptionally strong, what party or what sect may claim a monopoly of grief. When last Wednesday morning I first met, after my brief absence, the people of this village, I shall never forget the impression. It seemed as if the pall of a universal sorrow had settled here. Knowing my sad errand, people approached me freely, and the spoken sense of loss, the repressed sigh, the silent tear glistening in the eyes of gentle women and strong men;—not those alone who were especially his friends, but high and low as we rank them in the social scale; those who could not have voted with him at the polls, or for conscience' sake have walked with him to the house of God in company—this told the story. It seemed to all that the one who more than any other was the social stay and prop, the wisest in council, the safest to rely upon, had gone from us. To all it seemed a common loss: and ‘How shall we do without him?’ came from many a lip.

Now how gained he this ascendancy, his peculiar quality of influence? It were evident to anyone to whom this account were given that he must have been possessed of something more than merely amiable virtues. I might say he was the most husbandly of husbands, the most fatherly of fathers, the most brotherly of brothers, the most neighborly of neighbors, the most friendly of friends, and you might esteem and honor him so far as these qualities go; but it is plain they could never make for you the man we are contemplating. In a normal way great influence implies great faculties of some sort. A small man, indeed, through artificial agencies, as wealth or party or clique, may vault to a conspicuous place and shed down a great influence from it; but not thus can it be with one who like our friend scorns artificial agencies, and is content to be what the force of his own character and his proved worth shall make him. Such a one must always have great capacities in order to achieve great influence. And great capacities our friend certainly had. His intellect was subtle and penetrating; his mental grasp was firm and comprehensive. The fibre of his mind was fine; he possessed the tastes and instincts of a scholar; he was widely and profoundly read. He was gifted in no small degree with logical dexterity. He had that faculty of mental perspective, some-

what rare, which enables one to see facts or theories in their just relation as leading and subordinate. From this resulted a rare lucidity of utterance whether in private discussion or in public discourse. His personal presence was magnetic ; he was powerful to dispute and eloquent to persuade.

But let men ever beware how they confide in these high qualities. Rightly guided they may make one useful indeed ; but wrongly guided they may make him only more accomplished in infamy. The real secret and explanation of his hold upon us after these endowments are granted must be looked for farther down, in certain moral qualities that shaped and predominated his life. I will specify some few of these.

1. I point, first, to his royal integrity. Without this no man can be in any degree useful, for he cannot be trusted. That you found it in him, the ample measure of your trust bears witness. Now integrity is a virtue easy to name ; in certain relations and according to certain standards it may seem not difficult to practice. Of course it ought always to be expected. Yet of the men whose aims seem high and whose desires are not unworthy, I believe that more are shipwrecked from deficiency in this one virtue than any other. And this, I am inclined to think, is not primarily because the character is weak and the temptation strong, but because of a widely prevalent mistake as to the true moral basis. There seem to be two standards by which men regulate their conduct in relation to one another ; in other words, two standards of integrity. The one is easy, comfortable, and dangerous ; the other is stern, hard, and safe. You will find those, and, alas ! they are a numerous class, who aim to preserve an integrity up to the standard of the society in which they move ; and you will find those in numbers all too few who measure their conduct by a standard wholly within them. The one would so order their lives as to secure the good opinion of those about them ; the other would bow to immutable right. The former look to society as a sort of mirror by which to put on their moral habit. When it smiles they know no higher warrant ; when it frowns no sterner disapproval. The self-interest it allows they are ready enough to practice ; to the self-indulgence at which it winks they see no moral obstacle. The other makes conscience the supreme arbiter ; considers its pointing the way of right ; listens to its voice as the voice of God ; regards the

hardships and losses it commands as imperatives that may not be disobeyed, and the self-interest or self-indulgence it disapproves as iniquities that may on no account be practiced. Whatever easier standard society may hold up and offer to judge their conduct by, they are obliged to turn from it to the criterion within themselves. Now I need not urge that the former, since they are without moral center, can never be trusted. They may be in their aim never so high, in their intent never so true; yet because their right is the good opinion and their wrong the adverse criticism of those about them; because their moral criterion is not really theirs, no confidence can be reposed in them. The ground on which their moral structure is reared is an ever changing quicksand; and that structure is pretty sure at last to fall. Nor does society, however it may smile on such, really trust them. Instinctively it perceives their want of moral center. The only ones who are regarded safe and trustworthy, mark it when and where you will, are those whose moral standard is within. And here, if I have not fully mistaken him, we must class our friend and brother. He was self-poised. His moral criterion was ever at the center of himself. That conduct which the moral law forbade no easy social standard could make right for him. His right or wrong was never the social smile or frown, but the "*Thou shalt*," or "*Thou shalt not*," thundering from the Sinai within him.

And so you trusted him, as you will always trust such, certain that neither the seductions of self-interest, nor the voice of self-indulgence could tempt him where right had made plain her way. He gained his ascendancy amongst you by reason of his self-centered integrity. It is because of this, and because it proved equal to his sustaining that he won your confidence. He became the useful man you knew him, because while intellectually equal to great duties, he was also morally qualified to discharge them: because he was one whose large powers were directed by nothing less authoritative than the moral law within him, because he was one whose ability to do was not more conspicuous than his desire and purpose to do right. It was because of this marriage within him of high attainment with steadfast rectitude that you found in him one with whom you could leave your trusts, certain that he would safely guard them. Had he been otherwise, his life had worn an entirely different aspect. Had there

been wanting this moral rectitude, or had not his moral criterion been within, had it been the lax and easy standard of the society around him, he might still have been powerful in thought, able in debate, eloquent in appeal, but he had never been a trusted, honored, and useful man.

Secondly. Not less important in the development of his life, was that principle which led him to consecrate himself primarily to service and not to self. This we might indeed say would always be the course of a clear headed and just thoughted man. The true plan of life is, perform your part and take the natural results. Do the duty and accept the reward as it shall come. Set yourself to the achieving of a good and then let it bless you. This I say is the true plan of life, and the only one by which its prizes can be legitimately won. The prevailing maxims, however, are the other way. They seem ever to urge one to make his mark, to win a place, to conquer recognition. The common appeal of the day is to ambition. We set before us not our high calling but the prize thereof. Sometimes the course of our friend was remarked upon with expressed or implied criticism. Higher positions were easily within his reach ; he might have gained the upper rounds of official honor ; wealth was an easy possibility ; why then let such opportunities go by ? There is an aspect of the case from which I think his course not wholly defensible. At a time when official trusts are made the prizes of ambition and the incompetent and unscrupulous are competing for them, it seems in the line of duty for those so well fitted to win and discharge them to assert their natural right to them. I am inclined to think he had been a more useful man had he sought a higher or at least a more conspicuous usefulness. But the principle that deeply and most really controlled him is worthy to be held up here or anywhere. I remember once in conversation endeavoring to stir his ambition a little by showing him how much higher positions he might gain, how equal were his capacities to higher duties. "I know it," said he, "I have thought about it ; but where am I needed more than here ? To what people can I be more serviceable than to my own townsmen ?" Where am I needed more ? Is that the question the struggling, wriggling ambition and rivalry of to-day is wont to ask ? Yet the principle adopted by our friend no rational man will deny to be the true one. And how far its practical recognition went to making

him what he was I think you all must feel. When you gave him your trusts did you feel that in the discharge of them he aimed first to aggrandize his wealth or influence? When you honored him with office did he accept it as a prize he had won?—was it not as a duty given him to perform? When the poor man struggling with his poverty or the widow in her need came to him for counsel or guidance did that steady helpfulness come from one who filled his office primarily for the honor and profit it might bring him? Could he have been the man he was had not the higher sense of service and the supreme behests of duty moved him? No! No! The principle at the center moulds and colors and tones the life. A man can rise no higher, he can be no fairer than his animating motive.

Thirdly. As must always be the case with the man who would attain his best, his mind had an upward look. His spirit took nourishment from the contemplation of higher things. Religion was a very real thing to him. Christianity engaged not his passive but his active interest. Not a man in whom what currently passes for the religious sentiment was especially marked, he was yet one who sought out the substance of religion and strove to appropriate it. He was a man in whom faith was strong. Not a faith which means an excessive credulity; not a faith which means adherence to special beliefs and doctrinal systems; but a faith that lays hold on principles and holds trustfully, loyally to them.

To specialize a little, he had faith in Christ and Christianity. His faith in them, too, was too strong to allow him any misgiving as to the results of honestly, candidly, and with such light as he had, and all he could obtain, investigating them. He had no sense of danger to deter him from the disowning of any rite, from the rejection of any doctrine, or the doubting of any scripture. And this, friends, is the spirit in which Christianity should be approached. It says, “Reach hither thy finger and behold my hands, and reach hither thy hand and thrust it into my side.” The open, doubting, investigating mind; the mind that will remain open and will doubt, and will investigate, and will sternly refuse to accept anything that has not for it the seal and guarantee of absolute truth—that is what it demands. And this, we must all admit, it gets but very little of. And this, primarily, I apprehend, because there is such abounding want of the faith

our friend possessed. Doubting, investigating, calling in question, departing from the old landmarks ; leaving anchorage and buoy and harbor and lighthouse, and taking for your guidance some eternal star, sailing forth upon the ocean,—what will come of it ? we tremblingly ask. Is there not danger in thus heaving anchor? Is it not perilous to investigate? Will it do to doubt miracles? Is it not at the hazard of our soul's safety that we question inspiration? Will not Christianity be undermined if science go unbridled or if criticism hold its course? The true spirit of faith rather recognizes this, that there is immutable truth somewhere, and that there can be no peril in the earnest quest after it. If in the search we must needs leave old landmarks, why then, it says, it is better to leave them ; if Christianity can be undermined it ought to be. Besides, the spirit in man protests against rearing the structure of his religion on anything less enduring than the eternal adamant. The only system of belief that has any rightful claim on your mind and mine is one that can by no possibility be overthrown. Faith in Christianity, if it means anything means confidence that it rests on immutable foundations ; that investigation cannot disturb it, but rather does it service by tearing away the falsehoods that disfigure it.

And then again, to the clear headed, thoughtful, earnest man, it must always be apparent that the peril is all on the other side ; not in doubting, not in questioning, but in refusing to question ; restraining, coercing, repressing the heaven given faculties of the mind, self-sophistication, leading one to that most miserable of disbelief which consists in making believe believe,—a sin against the mind, and in the ultimate consequence a poison to the soul. Only believe is the pious shibboleth of the church. Only, I would rather say, honestly use the faculties God has given you ; take the truth as you see it, the light as it shall be revealed to you. There can be no danger in being true.

Such an one, actuated by such conviction, was the good man who has left us. Too honest with himself to make believe believe, too religious to repress or disown his doubts, he held the great themes of religion constantly before his mind ; he explored them as a man of his understanding ought, to find the central and vital truth that is in them. To this end he sought and labored, in the midst of a busy profession constantly recurring to his New Testament and religious meditation, and I deem it no

extravagance to say that the time and honest thought he devoted to religious themes would in itself rebuke the indolence of many a clergyman. And oh, how such contemplation sweetened, elevated and adorned his life !

Was this upright, high aimed, truth loving, truth seeking, truth trusting man a Christian ? Men, I suppose, will ask this question. Well, friend, suppose that you find that in consistency with some definition you may give to Christianity—you, I say, not I—you cannot call him a Christian. What then ?

“That which we call a rose
By any other name would smell as sweet.”

I ask again, was he a Christian ?

“But I remember still,
The word and whence it came.
Not he that nameth the name,
But he that doeth the will.”

“Not every one that saith unto me, Lord ! Lord ! but he that doeth the will of my Father.” My New Testament does not read, Blessed are the Baptists for theirs is the true baptism ; Blessed are the Congregationalists for theirs is the true doctrine : Blessed are the Episcopalians for theirs is the true church ; Blessed are the Unitarians for theirs is a free faith. The beatitudes I find contemplate something far deeper than the accidents of creed or worship. Was he a Christian ? Adopt for a moment the basis of life and character and then turn over your calendars of saints : call up the debased and dishonored lives of those for whose late repentance you give certificate to the kingdom of heaven ; nay, take the average plodding, careless, self-seeking, gain-pursuing multitude that throng our churches and whose salvation you suppose to be especially secure ; hold the two up before you, and over against each other and compare. Which looks the better ? Which in itself most honors God and is most worthy of the esteem of men ? If they be Christian and he is not, then are we not in honesty compelled to admit that there is in this world something better than being a Christian ? I see no escape from the admission. If to the untold multitude I have described, you can give a certificate to some future heaven ; if over their confined forms you can have the assurance to say they are safe, then if on the throne of the Universe there be one who disregards the form and accepts the eternal substance of things ; if

there be more regard for character than profession ; for life-long service than death-bed repentance ; if the scheme of salvation be something in accord with the eternal nature of things, and not an artificial device, nay, a hideous barter, then I declare to you I am willing to put on the "filthy rags" of that man's righteousness and go into the presence of my judge and stand my chance. If he was not a Christian, and I am not wholly mistaken in him, then the word Christian has no meaning that is worth anything to me.

The gentler and more attractive qualities were very largely his. He was cheerful, generous, sympathetic, tender. He was modest ; in his self-estimate, I think, faultily so. He could never accept the estimate which others made of his abilities. I think this often deterred him from worthy undertakings and led him to defer to the judgments of others where his own had been better.

He was in a marked degree appreciative. His demands were not unreasonable. Those near him when they struggled and failed were sure of his encouragement. When they succeeded they might count safely on his congratulation.

Since I have occupied this pulpit my relations with him have been unspeakably pleasant, and when my head is whitened and age has traced its furrows on my brow, I am sure I shall be unable to think of him without gratitude. For his manifest friendship, his encouragement, his sympathy, how many times have I wanted words to thank him. And yet while commendation was not unusual, its opposite was not infrequent. Sometimes when some mistake of mine had provoked harsh censure here and there, passing through his mind it suggested a kindly and judicious criticism which he sought me out and gave me in person. That, friends, would be a good way for you to treat one another.

How active was his interest in this church ! How constant was he in his pew ! How helpful in the Sunday school ! How zealously he guarded the interests of the society ! How he played the part of peacemaker amongst us ; and you know that at times we have needed a peacemaker.

But, as we say, he is gone. That brain has ceased to toil, that heart to throb. We shall meet him no more in the accustomed ways of life. We shall be helped no more by his sagacity, cheered no more by his encouragement, coerced no more by

his reproof, guided no more by his counsel. That loyal spirit has winged afar its flight. From some other sphere it may still behold us, but no more in mortal vesture will it dwell among us. But fair, clear and bright for us shines still the star that gulded him. Men may perish, but principles do not perish. Truth, virtue, honor,—these measure not their duration by heart throbs. And here is the culmination of my discourse. You honored him. What you honored in him were just as honorable in you. When you bare assent to the integrity, the high aim, the upward look, the onward pressing spirit which characterized him, let the impulse to realize these high qualities in yourselves lay hold upon you. All the principles that made his character so fair remain for us. Follow what you honor. Cleave to that in essence which in him concretely you revered. Happy is he who has such example before him; but happier is he who has such principles within him.

The question arises in many minds, what shall we do without him? We relied on him so much; he was so useful, so indispensable. We must, indeed, feel his loss, but there is only one thing to do, and that is, close up and go along. The duties he performed here, it is ours with more persistent effort to perform. Fortunately no one man is absolutely indispensable, however he may seem so, to the church or to the world. The part he sustained our united effort surely must be equal to. Deprived of his counsels, we will of ourselves and Him that is Highest take counsel. Deprived of our peacemaker, let us all turn peacemakers, or better still, let us all keep the peace, and then there will be no need of a peacemaker.

Shall we mourn that we have lost him? Nay, let us rather thank God that we have had him. We say, he is gone. Ah! that is a mistake. Not gone, but by the force of his high character and his upright example he is still here. Influences do not perish; impulses still abide. The best of him is still here. Not gone, but rather transferred to the

“Choir invisible
Of those immortal dead who live again
In lives made better by their presence.”

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